

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 01400 311320Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0891
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS
USCINCPAC

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USCINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJ: MORARJI DESAI LAUNCHES JANATA PARTY CAMPAIGN

1. MORARJI DESAI, VETERAN CONGRESS (O) LEADER AND
CHAIRMAN OF THE NEWLY-FORMED JANATA PARTY, LAUNCHED
THE OPPOSITION'S
CAMPAIGN AT A MAMMOTH PUBLIC RALLY IN
DELHI ON JAN 30. ESTIMATES OF THE SIZE OF THE CROWD
RANGED FROM 50,000 (POLICE ESTIMATE AND THAT ALSO USED
OVER VOA) TO 150,000 (ACCORDING TO ONE OF OUR LOCAL
EMPLOYEES WHO WAS PRESENT). IN HIS HOUR-LONG SPEECH
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PAGE 02 NEW DE 01400 311320Z

DESAI OUTLINED WHAT WILL PROBABLY BE THE MAJOR PLANKS
OF THE JANATA PARTY'S MANIFESTO. THEY FOLLOW CLOSELY
THE THEMES WE TOUCHED ON IN NEW DELHI 1254.

2. THE ISSUES WERE CLEAR, DESAI SAID: THE ELECTIONS
WERE A CHOICE BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP,

BETWEEN LAW AND LAWLESSNESS, BETWEEN PROGRESS AND FALSE CLAIMS OF PROGRESS. DESAI ADDED: "THIS ELECTION WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF INDIA. DEMOCRACY HAS BEEN SUFFICIENTLY WEAKENED IN INDIA IN THE LAST 19.9,5#. IT HAS BEEN STERILIZED. THIS ELECTION WILL DECIDE WHETHER WE WILL REMAIN AN INDEPENDENT PEOPLE OR TURN INTO A NATION OF SLAVES." HE SAID THAT THE EMERGENCY HAD UNLEASHED A "REIGN OF TERROR" ON THE PEOPLE AND SOUGHT TO REFUTE MRS GANDHI'S CLAIMS THAT THE EMERGENCY WAS NECESSARY TO ARREST THE CHAOS CREATED BY THE OPPOSITION. HE REGRETTED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD BRANDED HIM AND HIS COLLEAGUES AS TRAITORS AND ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE. IT WAS NOT THE OPPOSITION WHICH HAD INDULGED IN CHARACTER ASSASSINATION, BUT RATHER MRS GANDHI. DESAI URGED PEOPLE TO ABJURE VIOLENCE AND NOT TO DISTURB THE MEETINGS OF OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES. JAN SANGH LEADER ATAL BEHARI VAJPAYEE ADDRESSED THE RALLY ALONG SIMILAR LINES AND IN PARTICULAR CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR ALLOWING PRICES TO RISE. HE ALSO DELIVERED A STRONG ATTACK ON THE USE OF COMPULSION IN THE FAMILY PLANNING CAMPAIGN.

3. DESAI AVOIDED MAKING A PERSONAL ATTACK ON THE PRIME MINISTER, CRITICIZING INSTEAD HER POLICIES AND ACTIONS DURING THE EMERGENCY. HE IGNORED SANJAY COMPLETELY. OPPOSITION LEADERS MAY ADHERE TO THIS LINE DURING THE CAMPAIGN IN AN EFFORT TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON ISSUES RATHER THAN PERSONALITIES. AT ONE POINT DESAI STATED THAT HIS PARTY'S FIGHT WAS AGAINST THE RULING PARTY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 01400 311320Z

AND NOT AGAINST ANY INDIVIDUALS.

4. JANATA PARTY RALLIES WERE HELD IN OTHER MAJOR CITIES AS WELL. J.P. NARAYAN ADDRESSED A LARGE PUBLIC MEETING IN PATNA AND CLAIMED THAT DEMOCRACY WAS AT STAKE IN THE ELECTIONS. JANATA VICE CHAIRMAN CHARAN SINGH TOLD A LARGE CROWD IN KANPUR TO THROW THE CONGRESS OUT OF POWER AND THUS SAVE INDIAN DEMOCRACY.

5. ALTHOUGH A COMMON THEME IN THE SPEECHES WAS THE DEMAND FOR THE RELEASE OF ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS AND TOTAL LIFTING OF THE EMERGENCY, IT APPEARS THAT JANATA LEADERS ARE STILL UNDECIDED ON WHETHER THIS ISSUE WILL CAUSE THEM TO BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS. A GROUP OF JANATA PARTY LEADERS (INCLUDING VAJPAYEE BUT EXCLUDING MORARJI DESAI) CALLED ON THE PRIME MINISTER ON JAN 28 TO PRESS THESE DEMANDS. THE SAME DAY CHARAN SINGH STATED IN LUCKNOW THAT THE JANATA PARTY MIGHT RECONSIDER ITS DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELECTIONS IF ALL OPPOSI-

TION LEADERS AND WORKERS ARE NOT RELEASED IMMEDIATELY. HOWEVER, AT THE JAN 30 DELHI RALLY, WHILE DESAI CONCEDED THAT HIS PARTY FACED TREMENDOUS ODDS IN THE POLL, HE SAID IT COULD NOT BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS, SINCE THERE WAS NO OTHER VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.

6. COMMENT: THE RALLY IN DELHI WAS THE FIRST SUCH OPPOSITION GATHERING SINCE THE RALLY OF JUNE 25, 1975 (HELD AT THE SAME VENUE) AT WHICH J.P. NARAYAN HAD REPEATED HIS CALL TO SECURITY FORCES TO DISOBEY "ILLEGAL" ORDERS. THE EMERGENCY WAS PROCLAIMED IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE NEXT MORNING. ONE OF OUR LOCAL EMPLOYEES WHO ATTENDED YESTERDAY'S RALLY ESTIMATED THE CROWD TO BE FOUR TIMES AS LARGE AS THE PREVIOUS TIME. THE AUDIENCE WAS ESSENTIALLY MIDDLE CLASS AND SEEMED TO CONSIST MAINLY OF PEOPLE IN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE EMPLOYMENT, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND SHOPKEEPERS. LARGE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 01400 311320Z

NUMBERS OF SIKHS AND MUSLIMS WERE PRESENT. DURING THE SPEECHES JANATA LEADERS PLEADED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE. THE RESPONSE REPORTEDLY WAS EXCELLENT, AND MANY PEOPLE SEEMED TO GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO OFFER DONATIONS. SCHNEIDER

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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